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## THE NORMAL FAMILY

BY MARGARET F. BYINGTON,

Associate Secretary, American Association for Organizing Charity.

There is in history nothing more dramatic than the persistence for uncounted generations, through changes in industrial life, through experiments and failures in political organization, through the growth, decay and rebirth of religions, of the essential family unit—

“Oh 'im and 'er and it,  
Our blessed one in three.”

as Kipling phrases it. There has been variation enough indeed in the relation between the man and the woman, a relation which has sometimes been considered purely temporary, sometimes eternal. Underneath all these changes, however, we find the persistence of the essential bond, the physical dependence of the child on the fostering care of the mother and the reliance of both on the greater energy and courage and physical freedom of the father for protection and for sustenance.

The family as a unit has indeed functioned in many ways during these centuries; it has been the religious unit, especially in ancestor worship, the father serving as priest; it has been the property holding unit to which the right of inheritance was limited; it has been the industrial unit, the household forming a coöperative enterprise; it has been the educational unit, the custodian of the earlier experiences of the race; it has provided for the physical nurture of the child. It has varied in form and in legal status, moulded by changing industrial, social, and religious life. It has likewise been a factor of great value in securing stability of progress, on the one hand by preserving the traditions and experiences of the past, and on the other, by securing within the shelter of the home the chance for greater variability. If we are to understand the modern family we must see it in its relation to this historical development. By noting which characteristics of family life have persisted through these changes, which have weakened and which grown stronger, we get a truer idea of what does, indeed, constitute

a "normal family." In other words we shall not identify the "normal family" with the ideal family or with any one of the varied types of family life now existing in our own country. We shall attempt rather to express it in terms of certain fundamental personal relationships and habits of life and thought, which have characterized family life throughout its history.

#### PRIMITIVE FAMILY LIFE

Students of the family have disagreed widely as to what was probably its earliest form. Their theories have been based on historical documents which throw light on early family history or on reports of conditions among present day savage tribes. But even these sources are difficult of interpretation. We do not, for instance, know whether modern savage tribes are not degenerate rather than primitive groups; whether in fact, as Mrs. Bosanquet suggests, they did not fail to advance in civilization just because they had not developed a sound form of family life.

There seems to be, however, a growing tendency to agree that the primitive family, in all probability, resembled somewhat the unit which exists among those apes which are closest to man in type. The meat eating animals find little advantage in group activity since hunting, to be successful, must be carried on by individuals. So we find among certain apes, a very simple family unit: the female caring for the child during its period of weakness and helping to provide food by seeking roots, nuts, etc., near the home; the male, possessing freedom and greater energy and mobility, providing the main food supply by hunting, and serving as protector to the female and her young. This probably indicates the status of the primitive family, a temporary union, but one which, while it lasted, presented already those elements which have always constituted the basis of family life: the protection and care of the weak, the provision for physical maintenance, the joint sense of responsibility for the children. In other words, even this elementary family life had a psychological as well as an economic basis.

The great significance in the development of the human race of even this simple family unit has been stressed by Prof. John Fiske. The willingness of father and mother to sacrifice personal freedom for the care of their offspring made possible the prolongation of the period of infancy. While a chick can begin scratching for its own

food a few hours after it emerges from the egg, the human child cannot even feed itself for many months, and is now forbidden, by law, to try to earn its living for fourteen or sixteen years. This slow process of growth makes possible the variation on which progress depends; it gives time for education, so that each generation may begin its active life equipped with the knowledge won by its forbears, instead of beginning over again where they began. Out of the prolongation of infancy in the shelter of family life, civilization has been made possible.

The way in which this simple, un-self-conscious group developed into our modern family is too long and complex a story even to outline in such a paper. I would emphasize the fact, however, that for those who are doing case work, the history of the family, and its changing status possess genuine significance.

We may think of this development from two angles. Viewed externally it is a social and legal institution, comparable in importance to our governmental institutions, having prescribed forms and functions. Viewed from the inside, it forms the intimate background of the life of every individual, the most vital force in his personal development.

#### THE FAMILY AS AN INSTITUTION

First let us consider a few of the factors which have influenced the development of the family as an institution. As far back as history records, and in practically all of the present savage tribes, marriage is considered in some degree a matter of social concern. The fixing of the degree of kinship within which marriage may take place, the formal rites which accompany it, the limitation of the rights of divorce, are evidence that it was never considered a purely personal affair. Custom, religion, and law have all been invoked as means for securing a stable family life against the explosive force of personalities which refuse to be held by any tie.

The increasing legal control of marriage probably followed the development of private property on a large scale, since this made it necessary to arrange for the control of the wife's property and to determine the legal status of the heirs. Property rights have had more to do than moral standards with the attitude of the law toward the illegitimate child. Nevertheless, these legal sanctions, even though based on no higher motive, did stabilize family life during a

period when it might have been engulfed by the tide of lax moral standards.

Another stabilizing force has been the attitude of religious teaching toward the family, every great religion having sanctioned some form of the marriage relation. The family has a peculiar significance in those nations whose religion is that of ancestor worship since on the rites performed by his descendants depend the man's happiness in his future life, not for one generation only, but for an indefinite future. In the development of the Christian church, marriage came to be looked upon as one of the sacraments and an indissoluble bond. This has, of course, been one of the strongest elements making for stability in the modern family. Since the separation of church and state, the civil law has regulated marriage though the religious service still serves to strengthen the sense of the sacredness of the marriage tie. Families, moreover, tend to maintain a joint religious life and in "mixed marriages" the difference in religious faith is a potent source of instability.

The present variations in divorce laws in our different states simply indicate the general questioning state of the public mind as to how permanent this bond should be. It is, nevertheless, clearly established that the family is so important a social institution that the law must at least control the conditions under which it may be created or dissolved. The reality of family life, is, of course, based on something far deeper than legal regulation. As Dr. Goodsell phrases it, "Marriage grew out of the family, not the family out of marriage." The law will sanction but cannot create a genuine family life. Marriage has always, as now, nevertheless, been considered a matter not solely of personal, but also of public concern and control.

#### THE RELATION OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Not only the relation of husband and wife, but also that of parents and children has been influenced by legal and social standards. From the beginning, the family had its bond in the weakness of the child and in the simple feelings of affection and responsibility which that evoked. Naturally, however, this affection, which was instinctive not reasoned, died as the weakness which called it out was followed by strength and independence. Observers seem to agree that some sort of concern for the welfare of the child exists

among savages while the children are little, though, with their quick passions, they are often unnecessarily cruel to them.

Later, the relation of parents and children became a matter of legal definition. In patriarchal times and in the Roman and Greek families, we find that the child was really considered a chattel subject to his father's will; that no individual had any standing before the law except as part of a family group; that absolute power for life or death often rested with the father who was also priest and judge.

This tradition has, of course, given way until modern law restricts in many ways the rights of parents over their children, yet also calls for increased responsibility on the part of the parents for giving their children proper training. An enlightened court, for example, will take a child away from his parents' control if they persistently fail to provide a public school education or badly needed medical care. The training of the child is now considered a matter of joint concern on the part of state and parents, the former requiring the latter to live up to the major responsibilities for its welfare. Law, which formerly buttressed the family as a property holding unit, is now concerned rather with its educational and cultural value.

This change in the law's attitude toward the responsibilities of parents for their children is in part the crystallization of a new ideal of parenthood.

In looking back on primitive life, we perceive a great reversal in the relation of parents to their children. Aside from the feeling of personal affection children were then consciously desired mainly for their service to their parents; now parents center their efforts and ideals on the future of their children. In the early family children were desired because, economically, they were an asset, either in the household and industrial activities of the family, or later, as wage-earners; religiously because there would be no happy life after death unless there were children to carry on the ancestor worship.

Now, a man struggles to earn enough to give his children opportunities for education and for development which he missed. We are even attempting to restrict marriage to those who are capable of passing on a sound physique. The modern family is more and more centering its emphasis on the future of the race. It is, however, well for us as case workers, to realize that this is a recent change in the angle of vision and that especially on the economic side the old attitude still persists.

## THE NURTURE OF CHILD LIFE

A social worker who is a grandmother said to me the other day, "I resent it so when people speak of children as a burden, they are the great joy of life. I often think that the very poorest of our families have in them the elements of the greatest joys,—the love of man and woman and the presence of little children,—if they only knew how to take advantage of them."

Out of this interest and this joy in caring for children in their weakness and watching that weakness grow to strength, family life came into being, and has persisted. There is hardly a home so degraded that the spark is not there. Yet the question is not infrequently raised as to whether the family is the best place to train a child or whether substitutes more intelligent cannot be found. Certainly, experiments with the care of children indicate that in infancy at least, children need mothers of their own. Institutions, however scientific, apparently cannot give the infant just the kind of personal attention that it needs, as their high mortality rate indicates. "Mothering" is of value to the delicate little mechanism.

As a child grows older, it seems physically less dependent on family life, as witness the fine development of many boys who go to a boys' school in winter and boys' camp in summer. It may be doubted, however, whether such good physical care can be given anywhere nearly as cheaply by such institutions as in a good home.

But it is for the other factors of home life, its educational value in a broad sense, that no substitute has been found. We shall indicate some of the ways in which the home provides essential training, the practical education, the growth in self-control and self-sacrifice, the sense of values. Because there are two parents, the family gives the valuable influence on both boy and girl of both man and woman. It provides the normal contact between one generation and the next.

## ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

In the first place economic coöperation within the family has provided some of its greatest educational opportunities ever since that first primitive group that persisted because of the need of mother and child for food. During the patriarchal period the family reached perhaps its maximum of economic self-sufficiency: the head of the family surrounded by his wives and children and servants,

together tending flocks, weaving and dyeing the wool, raising their simple agricultural products. Even when agriculture was developed and people settled upon the land, so that this family group had to break up into smaller units, each unit tended still to live on the products of its own toil. With the development of industrial life economic continuity in family life remained, since the sons tended to take up the father's occupation. In the medieval guilds, for instance, entrance into a particular skilled trade was usually open only to sons of the guild members.

Following the "industrial revolution," however, changes in family life have come with an upsetting suddenness. The old tasks of our mothers have dropped from our hands and we are not always wise enough to find new ones to take their place. The father often has no trade, no sense of being anything but a cog in the industrial machine. The son does not tend to follow his father's footsteps; the son of the farmer becomes the city magnate and the son of the immigrant day laborer enters a profession. The family is now a genuine industrial unit only in agricultural districts where women and children have a part in production as well as in consumption. The sons, too, often stay on the farm until they are ready to marry, and even continue to work with their father after that, and to inherit the farm on his death. This state of affairs is, however, by no means universal, and the abandoned farms of New England now taken over by Italians and Slavs show the extent to which the opportunities which industrial development offers have destroyed this family tradition.

The normal family is still, however, the economic unit, in that it has to spend only that which it earns. The pay envelope takes the place of the harvest. Family coöperation is expressed now in terms of joint spending rather than of joint production, the family pooling its income and meeting therefrom the varied needs of its members for food and shelter, clothing, recreation, etc. That this economic self-sufficiency has persisted throughout the history of the family indicates that it bears an essential and continuing part in the development of family life.

It is, in the first place, essential because of the inevitable weakness of childhood and the burdens which it entails. An occasional woman, who has a profession, like writing, that can be done on part time, can carry it on all through her married life, but the rank and



file of business and working women must give up wage-earning during the years when they are bearing and rearing children. The old condition which was the initial factor in creating the family, still holds good, namely, the dependence of the mother and the little children on the freedom and strength of the man. Nor to those of us who believe in family life, is this an unfortunate relationship. It is a sharing of responsibility and of work, which is the foundation for mutual respect and devotion. If our minds were set clearly enough on the significance of childhood there would be less stressing of the inferior condition of the woman, since hers is really the more important task, and the most valuable contribution which the man makes is to the training of the children, the wage being from this point of view only a means to an end, the preservation of family life. (I am not raising here the question of the stimulating effect on women of business and professional opportunity or of the wisdom of remunerative work before and after the period when their children need them.)

To return to the economic problem as such. The normal family will depend on its own material resources, pooling the major part of the earnings of the various members of the family and providing from this fund the necessities for the life of the family. Willingness to make mutual sacrifices and the power of adjustment to others' needs grow out of this necessity for sharing in the income and subordinating one's own desires to those of the family as a whole; the oldest son who works at a thankless task that his younger brothers may go to college; the mother whose chief enthusiasm in spending is to see that her daughter has pretty things; the child who is willing to carry his lunch in a box to save for records for the family victrola are learning self-discipline. A child who goes out into the world with this standard and habit of mind is not going to become the citizen who goes into politics for what he can get out of it. The economic problem of the family thus provides one of its really educational opportunities. It is almost a truism that the absence of this realization of the relation between income and expenditure and the lack of this willingness to subordinate personal good to the needs of the group is one of the great weaknesses in the development of the institution child.

There is certainly a steady effect on expenditure when the family's income is the result of the family's labor. What we have

earned we treasure and, counting its value by the effort it cost, we want to get a corresponding value when we spend it. Income not produced by the work of individual members of the family never has this significance. In this as in other ways the family is the school for solving the practical problems of living.

#### EDUCATION IN THE HOME

The family has indeed always been the most important factor in the education of the child.

In primitive times, the family circle was also the school. The Indian boy was taught by his father the wood lore and the skill in hunting and fighting which was the accumulated wisdom of many generations; the little girl was given odd bits of leather and a porcupine quill with which to imitate her mother as she made moccasins. Through this practical education, the parents passed on the knowledge and the skill of the race. As tribal life developed the elders instructed the boys in their special cult. Little by little, as the amount of human knowledge increased, it became necessary to have wise men to pass that knowledge on. Yet not until the time of Christ were there among the Jews, for example, any schools outside the home, the family and the church being the only educational institutions.

Indeed, it is only recently that the western nations have provided free schooling for all children. Even in parts of our own country school attendance is not compulsory so that large numbers of children still find in the home their only opportunity for education. Knowledge in any theoretical sense becomes then the property of the few, but in the home is offered practical training, father passing on to son the knowledge of his craft, and mother to daughter the secrets of household arts.

There is perhaps no other feature in which modern life in America is so changing this family tradition. The Montessori school takes a child at four; the out-door school keeps him for play time as well as for school time; the domestic science department trains the girl in the home duties for which apartment life and the increasing number of domestic servants give her no opportunity at home. In our own earlier rural life there was a simple and complete division of task between school and home; home training in all the practical aspects of life through work on the farm and in the home, and the

"three Rs" at school. A college president is quoted as saying that he went to school for three months and had nine months left for his education. Now our schools are trying to combine the two in an educational system which has tremendous opportunities, but which nevertheless, needs to be adjusted to home life. The "visiting teacher" has shown the importance of individualizing the home background of the children if education is to be made really effective.

In spite of the increase in the scope of the school curriculum, the home still provides training in many of the most important aspects of our lives. I read with interest two contrasting descriptions of boy life in rural communities: "Pelle, the Conqueror," the story of the neglect, the coarse surroundings, the hard work that fell to the lot of a boy brought up on a little island off the coast of Denmark, and the "Son of the Middle Border," Hamlin Garland's story of his boyhood in the middle west. They vividly portray the difference in the content of life resulting when the home, as in the latter case, provided a background of love of music and of books, of intelligent interest in the things of the day.

Formal education can, it is true, overcome the lack of such a background, but for most children the whole future trend of thought is given its direction by the habits, the interests, the ideals, formed in these impressionable years. The home is still a most important, if not any longer the chief educational institution. Since the child learns in this school by imitation rather than by formal instruction, it is doubly essential that the home life be one which he may wisely imitate.

#### THE VALUE OF TWO PARENTS

The part which family life has played in the development of personality, in the more subtle relationships of individuals, is difficult to trace, as it lies so far beneath the surface. The early instinctive feeling of tenderness for the weak is at the basis of the altruism which now plays so large a part in our community life. In the days when every one outside the family or the clan was an enemy, concern for the welfare of others could be developed only within this narrow family circle. Later, as these emotions grew in strength and as men were brought into closer contact with those outside this circle, this concern could be carried over into, and modify, the new relationship. This affects both parents and children.

On the one hand, as Professor Tufts points out, the responsibility for training children has had a definite effect on the development of the moral code. Individual moral choices may result from a more or less unconscious acceptance of customary standards. But in order to teach children what they may do and what they must not do, a much more definite conception must be evolved not only of what is right and what is wrong, but of the reasons for that choice. The necessity for answering that ever-recurring, "Why?" of childhood, has helped to change a purely customary morality into one which is conscious and reasoned.

Conversely, of course, it is in the home that the fundamental attitudes toward moral and social values are acquired. Here, as in many other aspects of family life, we see the importance of having two parents. The child learns from the mother those tenderer virtues of sympathy and self-sacrifice which have become synonymous with motherhood, from the father standards of courage and self-reliance. These virtues do exist in the homes of the poor as those know full well who have entered at all intimately into their lives, and are essential everywhere to the development of sound family life.

We recognize this in the abstract but we often fail to see to it that the family lives under conditions that make this personal influence possible. Too great a burden put on the mother's shoulders will break down her patience—we all get irritable when we are tired—and then she ceases to be a stimulus to the child. Case workers should see that mothers are given a chance—a chance for recreation alone or with the children; decent clothing so that they can keep the respect of their children; and help in accepting American standards. The settlements are wisely trying to interest children in the traditions of the "old country" and to teach them to appreciate the beautiful handicrafts. There is nothing more dangerous than the breakdown of the mother's influence with the older children which often accompanies poverty. In proportion as the mother's life is well rounded and possessed of varied interests will she be able to train her children.

But there is another parent and he too has an influence. No family is normal without a father to provide the contact with the outside world, the stimulus, the sterner virtues. The increase in juvenile delinquency in both Germany and England since the war

began bears out this conviction. Case workers need to face this fact more clearly, and recognize that where this influence is absent a substitute for it must if possible be provided. During the war, for instance, it might be possible for the Home Service workers to interest the stay-at-home men in serving, in so far as an outsider can, as godfather to some soldier's boy.

#### EMOTIONAL CONTENT

If moreover, the family is to provide this essential training it must, we feel, not only be economically independent; it must have a genuine emotional background and it must have stability. Two emotional elements have been woven together into the texture of family life: the original sex impulse drawing together the man and woman, and the instinctive love for the child. Not only were they essential for the creation of the primitive family; they have been dominant elements throughout. They have modified each other, the sense of joint love and care for their children being probably the strongest factor in maintaining a permanent relationship between the man and the woman, the love of father and mother for each other influencing their attitude toward their children. (There is a noticeable difference in this respect in the attitude of parents toward adopted children where this emotional content is absent.) Without this emotional background serving to cement family life, the inevitable antagonisms and conflicts that must occur at times in any group living in such close contact would often cause its disintegration.

This may seem obvious, yet it again needs stressing in a consideration of the family for case workers. Do we consider enough how absolutely fundamental this emotional element is in maintaining family solidarity? Just as an illustration,—we are dealing with the family of a non-supporting husband and we urge the wife to take court action in order to force the man to resume his financial obligations. Do we always consider whether this is not going to destroy absolutely the emotional factors in the family life and do we consider it a last resort not a first one? Obviously we must, at times, utilize this means to bring a man to his senses, but do we often enough stop to ponder on the relative significance of emotional stability and economic independence? Do we often enough utilize the man's instinctive devotion to his children as a means of grace?

It is perhaps unnecessary to say that there may be at the other extreme an oversteering and sentimental attitude toward the relation of man and wife and children. Books, however, like "The Poor Man's House," and Miss Loames, "The Queen's Poor,"<sup>1</sup> indicate that there is throughout modern industrial life a sound underlying devotion and joy in family life on which we should more largely depend in family planning. It has, it is true, a physical and instinctive basis, but on that very basis, a genuinely spiritual structure may be reared.

It is, moreover, another element in family life which we must especially reckon with just now. Tremendous emotional adjustments are necessitated by the departure of the soldiers. The experiences in Canada in which intemperance and immorality are unfortunately not infrequent among wives of soldiers, heretofore women of irreproachable character, show what utter breakdown may result from this change in the emotional content of life; the substitution on the one hand, of strain and anxiety for the sense of assured protection and genuine comradeship, on the other, the sense of new freedom from control.

If we are to be truly helpful in tangled family situations we must reach a sympathetic understanding of the emotional elements involved and attempt either to strengthen normal relationships, or where that is impossible, reckon the effect on the whole life of the family of the absence of this fundamental factor.

#### FAMILY STABILITY

That a stable family life in which the child may secure its physical and moral development is necessary, is a conviction probably accepted by all case workers and one which is in our opinion borne out by the whole history of family life. If we believe that the mutual dependence of family life has been an important element in the growth of morality; if we believe that practical education in the home is valuable; if we see in the home a place for the nurture of spiritual life, we must recognize that permanence is essential.

There is, however, a change in the conditions which have kept the family stable. Some of these conditions were the economic usefulness of the family group, its relation to the holding of property, its religious significance. Of these, the second, the necessity

<sup>1</sup>See especially the chapter on "Husband and Wife."

for safeguarding property rights, has probably been the largest factor in creating legal safeguard for the family group. Yet, in this country, property rights have almost ceased to be a factor in maintaining family unity,—in fact, in the propertied class divorce is very frequent.

Since these earlier safeguards of family integrity are weakening, it behooves those who believe in its value to use every means to strengthen it through the development of its educational and cultural activities.

### THE NORMAL FAMILY

We have attempted to sketch in outline certain elements in the complex history of family life and the forces which have molded it. The significance of this development to the case worker seems to me twofold.

We talk rather easily about “restoring families to normal living.” We shall be more likely to achieve this without harm to the delicate fabric of family life if we see the family as a growing, developing unit of which its present form is only a stage and realize the process by which it has arrived here. We need to know the extent to which the father has been priest as well as provider; the family the center for moral and secular education; the way in which local customs passed on by the family have formed the basis for much of our morality and common law. With this background of understanding, we shall be keener to study “our families,” not simply as economic units, failing to function, but as the complex basis of the moral and spiritual life of the individual members. That surely adds to the complexity of our task, but adds also to its significance. Some other economic adjustment of human life is entirely possible, and has been portrayed delightfully in many of the Utopias, with a purely individualistic and transient relation between men and women and with the children provided for through public institutions. But the family has been not only the economic unit but the largest single factor in the development of the altruistic and spiritual factors in life, and for the stimulation of these elements a substitute is hard to find.

In the second place it lays upon the case worker the necessity for studying the reaction of industrial and social changes on family life. We are more self-conscious than our ancestors and more keen,

therefore, to watch the results of our own social experimentation. The thoughtful study of individual families will indicate the extent to which modern social institutions foster or destroy the proper functioning of human life. Through skilful observation of family problems we will find the sanest background for a developing social program.

#### CASE WORK AND THE FAMILY

There is need, moreover, that we recognize the elements in our communities which tend to break down this normal family life. That it has tremendous vitality is indicated by its survival through all the vicissitudes of history. But that in individual cases it does fail to function is too obvious to need stressing. Sickness, inadequate wages, bad housing, intemperance, immorality, all these and many other factors break down this finely adjusted institution. Some of these are factors outside the family itself, for which the community is responsible, and which must be removed by community action. More and more we recognize how many times family breakdowns may ultimately be traced back to unwholesome external conditions such as these: a tenement so small that there is no place for real family gatherings; a father whose hours of work are so long that he cannot share his children's lives; an income too small to make joint recreation possible; these and many like factors nullify the truly educational possibilities of the home. It certainly is a task for those of us who believe in the value of this family unit to study ever more searchingly the conditions which tend to lessen its value in the development of the child and to endeavor to overcome them.

In addition there will always be the task of trying to help re-establish as nearly as may be, the homes where family life has failed to maintain itself either because of external conditions or because of an internal breakdown. Every home so reestablished means a sounder background, a better training for each child in it, so that our task has genuine social significance. It is, nevertheless, a task which will be approached in humility of spirit, if we realize of how varied and subtle strands normal family life is woven, and how delicate is the task of so readjusting them that they will form the perfect pattern.